

A MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF COMPOUND NOUNS IN A. D. MALEDU'S SEPEDI DOCTORAL THESIS

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Abstract

Noun compounding is a linguistic process involving the combination of two or more lexical items to form a single noun. This method of word formation is effectively demonstrated in the translated Sepedi Bible as well as in translations of other African languages. This article seeks to critically assess the innovative use of compound nouns as observed in A.D. Maledu's doctoral thesis, which is written in Sepedi—one of South Africa's twelve official languages. Maledu's body of scholarly work is recognised for its prolific and distinctive use of compound nouns, showcasing a rare form of linguistic creativity in African-language scholarship. The article intensively assesses these compound nouns and explores their potential utility for Sepedi language custodians. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study primarily used document review as the data collection method. Out of the pool of compound nouns used in the thesis, only thirty-four (34) were purposively sampled for discussion. The findings were analysed thematically, thereby situating the study within a thematic framework. The analysis reveals that most of the compound nouns applied in the thesis are endocentric and copulative compounds, with minimal exocentric examples. Ultimately, the article commends the thesis author's inventive contribution to the development of compound nouns, thus enriches the corpus of Sepedi applied linguistics in the digital era and beyond.

Keywords: *compound noun; copulative; endocentric; exocentric; morphology; Sepedi; terminology development*

1. Introduction

Sepedi, also referred to as Sesotho sa Leboa, is one of South Africa's twelve official languages, spoken by residents in Limpopo, Gauteng, and Mpumalanga provinces. With more than 27 dialects (Mokgokong, 1966; Mojela, 2018; Rakgogo & Zungu, 2022), the language has its linguistic rules set and bound to be followed as a formal language for teaching and learning. Because of its linguistic history, Sepedi has developed a rich corpus of compound nouns for easier written and oral communication. According to Christianto (2020), compounding is one of the word-formation processes by combining one lexical item with another and thus produces a new word with a new meaning. Similarly, Maboja (2022) defines compounding as a term that combines the meanings of two different words. A compound noun can also be a word formation that involves joining two or more independent roots to form a single word (Ndimele, 1999). Like other global languages,

Sepedi is bound to compounding as a language that develops daily. Because of the constant expansion of everyday vocabulary, word formation is imminent and imperative (Tembane, 2025:2). Okolocha (2021) further states that word formation is a key component of the grammar of any language. Sepedi is not an exception to Okolocha's view mentioned above. Compounding as part of word formation forms a critical role in the development of terminology in the language. Overall, this article seeks to assess the use of compound nouns as observed in Maledu's (2020) Sepedi doctoral thesis. Utilising the Construction Morphology as a theoretical framework, the purpose of this article is therefore to analyse the morpho-semantic structure of the compound nouns as utilised in Maledu's thesis.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews previous studies on the three subtopics, namely giving an overview of the purpose of compounding, addressing the lack of compound noun studies in the Sepedi language, and briefly explaining key concepts revolving around compounding.

2.1 An Overview of Compounding

Mlambo and Matfunjwa (2025a) note that compounding plays a vital role in language, aiding language richness, vocabulary evolution and effective communication. The above three purposes of compounding apply to every language. The language becomes rich in vocabulary, and speakers and writers never run short of words with compounding in application. Ajiboye (2014) states that the processes that are involved in producing compounds are both morphological and syntactic. However, it appears that compounding is more of a morphological process, as it is the study of how words are formed and related to other words to create a language (Yule, 2020). Therefore, it can be contended that compounding plays a significant role in creating, developing, sustaining, and preserving languages.

Francis (1994) presents three ways to represent compounds, namely open, hyphenated and solid. In many cases, Sepedi applies the latter two, hyphenated and solid. There are no open compound nouns in Sepedi, that is, leaving the space between the stems of the two joined words. The findings of this article will prove this claim.

2.2 Compound Noun Studies in Sepedi

Compounding is a fundamental linguistic feature present in every global language. Notably, compound nouns—while relatively rare—are particularly vital in digitally evolving languages. In the digital age, language evolves rapidly, and African languages such as Sepedi are no exception. Given that nouns are among the most frequently used parts of speech, their formation through compounding is increasingly significant. Okolocha (2021) reinforces this perspective by asserting that word formation processes help keep a language dynamic and relevant, regardless of societal changes. While this view is widely accepted, what remains lacking in the case of Sepedi is sufficient research on compounding. Beyond Maboja's (2022) mini-dissertation, the most comprehensive study of compound nouns in Sepedi was conducted by Mphasha (2006). Recently, Tembane (2025) investigated the multivarious word formation techniques used to name Northern Sotho plants, focusing on affixation, compounding, reduplication and semantic extensions. This article thus seeks to address the gap in compounding studies within Sepedi, intending to encourage further research in this area.

2.3 Understanding Key Compound Terms

Noun classes refer to a particular category of nouns (Prinsloo & Gilles-Maurice de Schryver, 1999). For instance, the noun *motho* (person) in Sepedi falls under noun class 1 due to its nominal prefix *mo-*. Endocentric is when the basic meaning of a compound noun is determined by the categorical part, that is, one of the two constituents carries the main meaning while the other serves as the modifier (Mdoe & Lusekelo, 2024). The main constituent serves as the head. Exocentric is a case where the basic meaning cannot be transparently guessed from the constituent parts (Nóbrega & Panagiotidis, 2020). Therefore, these are the headless compounds. Copulative refers to the types of compound nouns wherein both constituents carry equal meaning (William, 1982). Both members usually function collaboratively.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, given the nature of its inquiry. It analyses written words without the inclusion of numerical data. As noted by Polkinghorne (2005), qualitative research focuses on analysing data derived from written or spoken language, rather than numerical data. Accordingly, this article examines the use of compound nouns within an African language study. A purposive sampling technique was considered appropriate for this type of research. Maledu's (2020) body of scholarly work was purposively selected due to its extensive and relevant use of compound nouns. These compounds contribute to the enrichment of vocabulary for future scholars conducting research in the Sepedi language, particularly in developing appropriate research terminology—especially methodological terms. The primary data collection tool employed in this study was document review. Morgan (2022) describes document review as a method for analysing various forms of documentation, including books, newspaper articles, academic journal articles, and institutional reports. The researcher conducted a thorough and critical reading of the thesis, focusing on the identification of compound nouns due to their morphological structure. The data were analysed thematically by categorising the different types of compound nouns identified in the thesis. The researcher followed all six steps of thematic analysis: being familiar with data, generating relevant data, searching for themes (types of compounds in this case), reviewing themes, defining and naming the types of compounds, and ultimately writing up the analysis. These compound nouns were classified morphologically and syntactically according to their component parts of speech. In terms of ethics, this is a desktop linguistic research that looks at a language structure without the involvement of human beings or animals.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the compound nouns identified in Maledu's doctoral thesis, along with their translation equivalents and corresponding page numbers. The results are organised according to the morphological constructions employed by the author, beginning with the Noun + Noun → Noun (N + N → N) combination.

4.1 Noun + Noun Compounds

These compound nouns consist of a noun + noun combination that results in the formation of a new noun with a distinct meaning. The following examples adhere to the N + N → N morphological construction:

Compound	Noun 1	Noun 2	Translation
Dikošatšhaba (pg.iv)	koša	setšhaba	Folksongs

The bound morpheme "di-" is added as a nominal prefix to the noun *-koša*. The right-hand part consists of another noun, *tšhaba*, with the original prefix *se-* being omitted. Therefore, the writer employs two nouns to form an endocentric compound noun, *dikošatšhaba* (meaning "folksongs"). It is endocentric because the first constituent, *dikoša* (songs), carries the basic meaning, with *setšhaba* (nation) representing to whom the songs belong.

Compound	Noun 1	Noun 2	Translation
Lehlakanoka (pg.71)	Lehlaka	noka	River reed

In *Lehlakanoka*, it appears that two nouns are merged to form a single noun. The noun *lehlaka* (reed) takes the nominal prefix '*le-*' of noun class 5 in the singular. The right-hand component is *noka* (river), a noun for noun class 9. This is the type of copulative compound noun because both *lehlaka-* and *-noka* contribute equally towards the semantic content of this compound.

Compound	Noun 1	Noun 2	Translation
Kgapampshikela (pg.30)	kgapa	mpshikela	guru

In the copulative compound *Kgapampshikela*, both constituents contribute equally to the overall meaning. The left-hand component, *kgapa*, is derived from noun class 9, marked by a null morpheme (n-), with *kgapa* functioning as a free morpheme. The right-hand component, *mpshikela*, originates from noun class 3 and comprises the prefix *mo-* and the stem *fshikela*. In this instance, an assimilation process occurs: the bilabial nasal /m/ influences the fricative /f/, resulting in the bilabial plosive /p/, while the vowel *-o-* is elided.

Compound	Noun 1	Noun 2	Translation
Dinonwanekošana (pg.116)	dinonwane	košana	tale songs

The compound *Dinonwanekošana* is formed through the combination of two nouns: *nonwane* (tale) and *košana* (short song). The left-hand component, *dinonwane*, features the nominal prefix *di-*, classifying the noun under class 10, while *-nonwane* serves as the free morpheme. The right-hand component, *košana*, is derived from the traditional noun *dikošana*, where the diminutive suffix *-ana* is attached to indicate the shortness of the song. The root *-koš-* functions as the free morpheme. It is a copulative compound as both *nonwane* and *koša* contribute equally to the semantic content of the whole word.

Compound	Noun 1	Noun 2	Translation
Borakgolokhukhu (pg.116)	rakgolo	khukhu	Great grand-fathers

The first constituent includes the nominal prefix *bo-* of noun class 2a, followed by the noun *-rakgolo* (grandfather), while the second constituent is the noun *-khukhu* (great-grand). The primary lexical items contributing to meaning are *rakgolo* and *khukhu*. This is classified as an endocentric compound noun, with *rakgolo* as head and *khukhu* as modifier.

4.2 Verb + Verb Compounds

The compound nouns in this category follow the Verb + Verb → Noun (V + V → N) morphological construction. Most of these are derivational nouns, meaning they are derived from verbs—also referred to as deverbatives. The following examples illustrate this construction:

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Kahlaahlongwalwa (pg.8)	ahlaahla	ngwala	written discussion

The nominal compound *Kahlaahlongwalwa* consists of two verbal roots: *ahlaahl-* (to discuss) and *ngwal-* (to write), each typically taking the verbal suffix *-a*. The nominal prefix /k/, a voiceless plosive, is introduced in the noun formation process, placing the word in noun class 9, which is marked by a null morpheme (n-). Additionally, the causative extension *-w-* is inserted in the right-hand element *ngwal-* to facilitate nominalisation, thereby contributing to the compound's function as a noun.

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Segatišatiragatšo (pg.12)	gatiša	diragatša	Performance recorder

The nominal prefix *se-* of noun class 7 is added to the verbal root *-gatiš-* along with the suffix *-a* to form the first constituent. The right-hand component derives from the verbal stem *diragatša*, which transforms into *tiragatšo* through the substitution of the initial plosive /d/ with /t/, converting it into a noun. Additionally, the verbal suffix *-a* changes to *-o*. Thus, the components *segatiša* (recorder) and *tiragatšo* (performance) combine to form the final compound noun.

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Peakanyonyakišišo (pg.8)	beakanya	nyakišiša	Research design

In the above compound, two verbal stems—*beakanya* (to design) and *nyakišiša* (to research)—combine to form the final noun. The initial plosive /p/ replaces the bilabial /b/ in *beakanya* to classify the word under noun class 9, while the final vowel *-a* changes to *-o*, producing the deverbative *peakanyo*. In the right-hand component, only the final vowel *-a* is replaced by *-o* to create the deverbative *nyakišišo*.

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Poeletšothalo (pg.117)	boeletša	thala	Line repetition

In the poetically well-formed compound *Poeletšothalo*, the thesis writer combines the verbal stems *boeletša* (to repeat) and *thalo* (line). In the first component, the bilabial /b/ is replaced by the plosive /p/, and the verbal ending *-a* is replaced by the suffix *-o*, forming the deverbative *poeletšo*. The left-hand component is derived from the verbal stem *thala*, where the final vowel *-a* is also replaced by *-o*, creating the deverbative *thalo*. The resulting compound *poeletšothalo* is classified as an exocentric compound, as its meaning, “line repetition”, refers to the poetic line being repeated in the subsequent line rather than directly to either constituent.

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Borabokgobammimo (pg.18)	kgoba	bina	Music compilers

The complex compound *Borabokgobammimo* contains multiple nominal prefixes. The initial prefix *bo-* belongs to noun class 2a, indicating a plural reference to many music compilers. The second prefix *ra-* in Sepedi carries the semantic feature [male], as noted by Mojapelo (2009). The third prefix *bo-*, from noun class 14, does not determine the lexical category of the noun, similar to *ra-*. Among these prefixes, only the *bo-* of class 2a contributes to the lexical categorisation of the compound. Within the left-hand constituent, the verbal stem *-kgoba* (to compile) is derived from the root *kgob-* plus the verbal ending *-a*. The right-hand constituent is the deverbative *mmimo*, which originates from the verbal stem *-bina* (to dance). Here, the bilabial /b/ assimilates to the bilabial /m/ due to proximity, illustrating an assimilation process. In summary, this compound is formed from two verbal stems: *go kgoba* (to compile) and *go bina* (to dance).

Compound	Verb 1	Verb 2	Translation
Baruti-ba-thomo (pg.18)	ruta	roma	Missionary reverends

The above hyphenated compound consists of two meaningful constituents: *baruti* (reverends) and *thomo* (sent). Both are deverbatives. *Baruti* is formed from the nominal prefix *ba-* of noun class 2, the verbal root *-rut-* (to teach), and the verbal ending *-a*, which ultimately transforms into the suffix *-i* to nominalise the verb. The morpheme *-ba-*, positioned in the middle of the compound, functions as a bound morpheme linking the two core elements. The second part, *thomo*, originates from the verbal stem *roma* (to send), where *rom-* is the root and *-a* the original ending. In the process of forming *thomo*, the plosive /th/ replaces the original /r/, and the final vowel /a/ is replaced by /o/, resulting in the deverbative *thomo*.

4.3 Noun + Verb Compounds

The following compound nouns follow the Noun + Verb → Noun (N + V → N) morphological construction.

Compound	Noun	Verb	Translation
Mokgwanyakišišo (pg.37)	mokgwa	nyakišiša	Research method

The noun *mokgwa* (method) is combined with the deverbative *nyakišišo* (research). The left-hand component *mokgwa* consists of the nominal prefix *mo-* from noun class 3 in singular form, with the stem *-kgwa*, which also functions as a free morpheme. The right-hand component *nyakišišo* is derived from the verbal root *-nyak-* (to seek/search), with the applicative extension *-išiš-* and the nominalising suffix *-o*.

Compound	Noun	Verb	Translation
Mongmošomo (pg.155)	mong	šoma	employer

The compound *Mongmošomo* is derived from the noun *mong* (owner) and the deverbative *mošomo* (job). The prefix *mo-* on the left-hand side functions as the nominal prefix for noun class 1. On the right-hand side, *mo-* also appears as a nominal prefix but does not influence the headedness of the compound nor determine its noun class. The right-hand component is formed from the verbal root *šom-* (to work) with the verbal ending *-a*, which changes to *-o* in the nominalisation process, resulting in the deverbative *mošomo*. This compound is classified as endocentric, as the semantic head of the compound lies in the right-hand constituent (*mošomo*), with (*mong*) indicating who owns the job.

Compound	Noun	Verb	Translation
Mekgwatlhaolo (pg.10)	mekgwa	hlaola	Sampling methods

In the compound *Mekgwatlhaolo*, the first constituent is *mekgwa* (methods), which carries the nominal prefix *me-* from noun class 4, indicating plurality. The second constituent is derived from the verbal stem *hlaola* (to sample). In the process of forming the compound, the voiceless fricative /h/ is replaced by the plosive /t/, and the verbal ending *-a* is substituted with *-o*, resulting in the deverbative *tlhaolo*. The final nominal compound, *mekgwatlhaolo*, is written as a solid word.

Compound	Noun	Verb	Translation
Mokgwakgonagalo (pg.10)	Mokgwa	kgonagala	Probability sampling

The compound *Mokgwakgonagalo* follows the same morphological process as the previous example. The noun *mokgwa* (method) is in the singular form and belongs to noun class 3, marked by the nominal prefix *mo-*. The second constituent, *kgonagalo* (probability), is a deverbative derived from the verbal stem *kgonagala* (to become possible). In the nominalisation process, the verbal ending *-a* is replaced by the deverbative suffix *-o*.

Compound	Noun	Verb	Translation
Mokgwatebanyi (pg.11)	mokgwa	lebanya	Convenience sampling

The above compound consists of two constituents: the noun *mokgwa* and the deverbative *tebanyi*. The first component includes the nominal prefix *mo-* of noun class 3 and the free morpheme *-kgwa*. The second component, *tebanyi*, is a deverbative derived from the verbal stem *lebanya*. In the derivational process, the lateral /l/ is replaced by the plosive /t/, and the verbal ending *-a* is substituted with the nominal suffix *-i*, forming *tebanyi*. This compound is classified as endocentric, as it refers specifically to a type of research methodology, with the left-hand constituent *mokgwa* functioning as the semantic head of the compound.

4.4 Verb + Noun Compounds

The thesis writer also employed the Verb + Noun → Noun (V + N → N) morphological construction. Most compounds formed in this way are endocentric, with the dominant meaning carried by the right-hand constituent. Consider the following example:

Compound	Verb	Noun	Translation
Kgatelelontšu (pg.31)	gatelela	lentšu	Voice emphasis

The first constituent is derived from the verbal stem *gatelela* (to emphasise), with the plosive /k/ prefixed as a null-bound morpheme to classify the word under noun class 9. The second constituent is the noun *-ntšu*, with its nominal prefix *le-* omitted during compounding. The resulting compound, *Kgatelelontšu*, is classified as an endocentric compound, as the dominant semantic meaning lies in the right-hand constituent *lentšu*, while the deverbative *kgatelelo* (emphasis) functions as a modifier. The compound, therefore, denotes a specific type of voice; namely, one that is emphatic in nature.

Compound	Verb	Noun	Translation
Dikanegelotšhaba (pg.3)	anega	setšhaba	Folk narratives

In the compound *Dikanegelošhaba* the left-hand constituent consists of the nominal prefix *di-* from noun class 10 and the deverbative *kanegelo*, which is derived from the verbal root *aneg-*, the applicative extension *-el-*, and the verbal ending *-a*. Additionally, the plosive *-k-* is inserted after the nominal prefix to facilitate nominalisation. The right-hand constituent is the traditional noun *tšhaba* (nation/people), with its original prefix *se-* omitted in the compounding process. The final compound, *Dikanegelošhaba*, is classified as endocentric, as the dominant semantic element lies in the left-hand constituent *dikanegelo* (narratives), which is qualified by the right-hand element *tšhaba* (of the people), thus denoting narratives that belong to or originate from the people.

Compound	Verb	Noun	Translation
Tlhabošontšu (pg.15)	hlaboša	lentšu	Voice-raising

In *Tlhabošontšu*, the compound consists of a verb-derived noun and a traditional noun. The left-hand constituent is the deverbative *tlhabošo* (raising), which originates from the verbal root *hlaboš-* combined with the verbal ending *-a*. In Sepedi, the fricative cluster */hl/* regularly shifts to the plosive */tlh/* during the process of deverbative formation—this phonological change is evident in the transformation to *tlhabošo*. The right-hand constituent is the noun *ntšu* (voice), derived from *lentšu*, with the nominal prefix *le-* omitted in the compounding process. This compound is classified as endocentric, since the dominant semantic component is the right-hand noun *lentšu* (voice), while the left-hand deverbative *tlhabošo* (raising) functions as a modifier, specifying the nature of the voice being referred to.

Compound	Verb	Noun	Translation
Matsentšhagae (pg.34)	tsentšha	gae	Opening line/introduction

The compound *Matsentšhagae* is formed by combining *matsentšha* and *gae*. The left-hand component consists of the nominal prefix *ma-* from noun class 6, the verbal root *-tsen-* (to enter), the verbal extension *-tšh-* (intensive/causative), and the verbal ending *-a*, resulting in the deverbative *matsentšha*. The right-hand component is the noun *gae* (home).

Compound	Verb	Noun	Translation
Batšwabodikela (pg.18)	tšwa	bodikela	Westerners

In the above example, the compound is formed from two components: *batšwa* and *bodikela*. The first part, *batšwa*, consists of the nominal prefix *ba-* from noun class 2 and the verbal stem *-tšwa* (to come from), referring to people. The second part, *bodikela*, is a locative noun denoting “the west.” Since the compound refers to people originating from the west, and this meaning is not explicitly stated by either constituent alone, the compound is thus classified as exocentric.

4.5 Noun + Adjective Compounds

Maledu (2020) makes use of compound nouns following the Noun + Adjective → Noun (N + Adj → N) construction in her thesis. These compounds are generally classified as endocentric, as the dominant semantic meaning consistently derives from the left-hand constituent (the noun). For instance, in the following combinations:

Compound	Noun	Adjective	Translation
Bathobagolo (pg.11)	batho	bagolo	Elders/adults

In this example, the left-hand constituent consists of the traditional noun *batho* (people), where the bound morpheme *ba-* functions as the nominal prefix of noun class 2, and *-tho* serves as the stem. The right-hand constituent is *bagolo* (elders), where *ba-* is the nominal prefix and *-golo* is the adjectival root meaning "elder." This compound is classified as endocentric because the dominant semantic element lies in the left-hand noun *batho*, while the right-hand element *bagolo* functions as a modifier, specifying the kind of people being referred to—elders.

Compound	Noun	Adjective	Translation
Dikarolokgolo (pg.26)	karolo	kgolo	Larger parts

The first constituent comprises the nominal prefix *di-* of noun class 10 and the deverbative *karolo*, which is derived from the root *-arol-* (to divide or separate) and the verbal ending *-a*. The second constituent is the adjective *kgolo* (large), which originates from the adjectival root *-golo*. This compound is classified as endocentric, as the left-hand component *dikarolo* (parts) serves as the semantic head, while the right-hand adjective *kgolo* modifies it to specify the size.

4.6 Verb + Adjective Compounds

Compound	Verb	Adjective	Translation
Moswananoši	swana	noši	uniqueness

In the above compound *Moswananoši*, the first constituent is the deverbative *moswana*, derived from the verbal root *swan-* (resemble) and the verbal ending *-a*. The nominal prefix *mo-* is attached, marking either noun class 1 or 3, depending on context. The second constituent is the adjective *noši* (distinctive), which conveys the notion of "oneness". Together, the compound expresses the idea of uniqueness.

Compound	Verb	Adjective	Translation
Batšweletšibagolo (pg.56)	tšweletša	bagolo	Senior producers

The endocentric compound *Batšweletšibagolo* is formed by combining the deverbative *batšweletši* (producers) with the adjective *bagolo* (seniors). The left-hand component, *batšweletši*, consists of the nominal prefix *ba-* from noun class 2, the verbal root *-tšw-* (to produce), and the applied extensions *-el-* and *-tš-*, with the suffix *-i* replacing the verbal ending *-a* to form the deverbative noun. The right-hand component, *bagolo*, is composed of the prefix *ba-* (also of noun class 2) and the adjectival root *-golo* (senior).

4.7 Verb + Adverb Compounds

Compound	Verb	Adverb	Translation
Phatadiganong (pg.11)	fata	ganong	Interviews

In *Phatadiganong*, the first component is *phata* (to dig/interrogate), derived from the verbal stem *fata*. The fricative /f/ changes to the plosive /ph/ due to phonological assimilation during noun formation. The second component consists of the plural prefix *di-* and the adverbial locative *-ganong* (in the mouth), which is formed from *legano* (mouth) combined with the locative suffix *-ng*. Since the overall meaning of the compound refers to

the act of questioning or interrogating someone, it is classified as endocentric, with the dominant semantic element found in the left-hand component *phata*.

Compound	Verb	Adverb	Translation
Kamegompe (pg.3)	ama	mpe	Negative affection

In *Kamegompe*, the left-hand constituent *kamego* originates from the verbal stem -*ama-* (to affect). The plosive /k/ is added to nominalise the form, along with the extension -*g-* and the suffix -*o*, resulting in the noun *kamego*. The right-hand constituent is the adverb of manner *mpe* (badly), which describes the nature of the affection. The adverb *mpe* derives from the root *be-*, with the bilabial /m/ prefixed, which proximally influences the bilabial /b/ to shift into the plosive /p/ through assimilation. This compound is classified as endocentric, as the primary semantic focus lies in *kamego* (affection), while *mpe* modifies it by indicating the negative quality of the affect.

Compound	Verb	Adverb	Translation
Sekhutamoyeng (pg.31)	khuta	moyeng	Suffocation

In the compound noun *Sekhutamoyeng*, the two constituents are the deverbative *sekhuta* and the adverbial noun *moyeng*. The first part consists of the nominal prefix *se-* from noun class 7 and the verbal stem -*khuta* (to choke/suffocate), forming the deverbative *sekhuta*. The second part is the noun *moya* (air) combined with the locative suffix -*ng*, resulting in *moyeng* (in the air). The compound as a whole conveys the idea of being choked or suffocated in the air, and is structurally an endocentric compound.

4.8 Noun + Adverb Compounds

Compound	Noun	Adverb	Translation
Dinagamabapi (pg.158)	naga	mabapi	Neighbouring countries
Dinagantle (pg.158)	naga	ntle	Outside countries

In the compounded words *Dinagamabapi* and *Dinagantle*, the same morphological process is employed. Both compounds begin with the plural noun *dinaga*, where *di-* serves as the nominal prefix for noun class 10 and -*naga* functions as the free morpheme meaning "country." The second components, *mabapi* (nearby/adjacent) and *ntle* (outside), function as adverbial place expressions and also act as free morphemes in the compound structure. These are classified as endocentric compound nouns, as the head noun *dinaga* (countries) carries the dominant meaning, while the second constituent specifies the type or spatial relation of the countries being referred to.

Compound	Noun	Adverb	Translation
Dinaga-selegae (pg.42)	naga	selegae	Rural villages

The above morphological construction is also applied in forming the compound noun *Dinaga-selegae*, with a hyphen inserted in this instance. The plural noun *dinaga* (villages), consisting of the nominal prefix *di-* from noun class 10 and the free morpheme -*naga*, is combined with the adverbial place *selegae* (rural) to form the endocentric compound *dinaga-selegae*. The dominant semantic meaning lies in the left-hand constituent *dinaga*, while *selegae* specifies the type of village being referred to.

Similarly, the compound nouns *Sebopegontle* and *Sebopegogare* (meaning “external structure” and “internal structure,” respectively) [pg. 115] follow the same morphological process. The left-hand constituent in both is the deverbative *sebopego* (structure), which consists of the nominal prefix *se-* from noun class 7, the verbal root *-bop-*, the applied extension *-eg-*, and the verbal ending *-a*, which changes to the nominal suffix *-o*. The right-hand constituents, *ntle* (outside) and *gare* (inside), are adverbs that specify the spatial orientation of the structure. These compounds are both classified as endocentric, as the main semantic element resides in *sebopego* (structure), while the adverbial modifiers refine its type or location.

4.9 Adjective + Noun Compounds

There is only a single compound noun in the thesis that follows the Adjective + Noun → Noun (Adj + N → N) morphological construction. An example is the following:

Compound	Adjective	Noun	Translation
Lesome-lekgolong (pg.9)	lesome	lekgolong	Ten percent

In the compound *Lesome-lekgolong*, the thesis writer uses a hyphen to demarcate the two constituents: the adjective *lesome* (ten) and the locative noun *lekgolong* (to/into a hundred). The first part comprises the nominal prefix *le-* from noun class 5 and the stem *-some*. The second part consists of the nominal prefix *le-*, the stem *-kgolo-* (hundred), and the locative suffix *-ng*. This compound exemplifies an Adjective + Noun → Noun construction and is classified as a copulative compound noun, as both constituents—*lesome* and *lekgolo*—contribute equally to the overall semantic meaning of the noun.

Drawing from the results presented above, it is evident that the majority of compound nouns used in the thesis are endocentric and copulative, with minimal use of exocentric compounds. In Sepedi, copulative compounds appear to be contextually appropriate; however, they do not align neatly with the principles of Construction Morphology, as the second constituent does not govern or determine the properties of the first. Instead, both constituents function as co-heads, contributing equally to the semantic and grammatical interpretation of the compound noun (Maboa, 2022).

Mphasha (2006) observes that compounds in Sepedi are predominantly nominal in nature, implying that the outcomes of morphological constructions typically result in nouns rather than other parts of speech. This phenomenon is largely attributed to the influence of the nominal prefix on the first morpheme (Maboa, 2022). The findings of this article support Mphasha’s claim: all compound formations identified in the thesis are nominal in structure. The semantic extensions, as techniques of extending the literal meaning of a word (Mrizay & Lusekelo, 2023:2), also play a great role in forming compounds in Sepedi, as demonstrated in the results.

Okolocha (2021) maintains that compound words across languages tend to behave as single lexical items. Regardless of the individual meanings of their components, the resulting compounds acquire a unified, often idiomatic, meaning. The analysis presented here aligns with this view. With the exception of three hyphenated forms, the compound nouns found in the thesis are written as single words. This suggests that Maledu has largely adhered to Rule 82 as outlined in *Melao ya Mongwalo le Mopeleto ya Sesotho sa Leboa* (2019), which prescribes that compound nouns in Sepedi should be written as single, unified lexical items.

While Fabb (1984) argues that some compounds may not undergo derivational processes, this does not hold true in the present analysis. All of the compounds examined

underwent derivational morphology, with many appearing as deverbatives—nouns derived from verbs. Notably, a significant number of them follow the $V + V \rightarrow N$ morphological construction.

A remarkable historical example of compound formation in Sepedi appears in D.N. Moloto's *Tšhipu e rile ke lebelo...*(nd.), where he constructs the longest recorded hyphenated compound noun: *samphapha-sa-maeba-sa-ngwana-kgwale-a-fofa-o-bone*. This complex compound consists of the nouns *samphapha* (volery), *maeba* (doves), *ngwana* (fledgling), *kgwale* (partridge), and the verbs *fofa* (fly) and *bone* (see). The additional hyphenated elements are bound morphemes that serve concordial agreement functions. It is a rare type of exocentric compound because the semantic content of this word cannot be guessed from either of the six constituent sections. This compound follows the morphological pattern $N + N + N + N + V + V \rightarrow N$.

5. Conclusion

According to Mojapelo (2018), Sepedi lacks an adequate and comprehensive body of terminology. Mlambo, Matfunjwa & Skosana (2025b) and Marhanele (2017) further allude to the same problem in Xitsonga. This article affirms that claim. The extensive use of compound nouns in Maledu's thesis raises a critical question: does Sepedi possess sufficient terminological resources to support advanced academic and intellectual discourse? The answer, as evidenced by the thesis, is a clear no. Compounding emerges as one of the most effective strategies through which language users can expand the lexicon and develop terminology. This is crucial for enabling diverse discourses in any given language—Sepedi, in this case. The findings of this article demonstrate that, in the context of the rapid expansion of global languages driven by digital technologies, compounding—alongside neologism—is essential for linguistic growth. The digitisation and standardisation of newly coined words, particularly in African indigenous languages, is therefore an urgent and strategic imperative. In this regard, the thesis writer sets a progressive precedent for linguistic innovation and terminological development in Sepedi. Future studies should systematically document and digitise compound formations to ensure sustainable terminological development in Sepedi.

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